

transmits the generated seating-order information to the communication network NT to send it to the teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn.

Although details will be described later, the teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn receive the seating-order information sent from the seating-order determination device GJD at the information manipulation and distribution sections PB; and the information manipulation and distribution sections PB determine the correspondences between conference participants HM and monitor devices MD according to the seating-order information as described later, applies video and audio manipulation such that, for example, a change in seating order is easy to understand, and sends images and sound related to the conference participants HM corresponding to the monitor devices MD2 to MDn to implement the determined seating order.

4. Grouping processing in the seating-order determination device

Various methods for determining a seating order can be considered for the seating-order determination device GJD. A method can be considered as an example, in which a conversation group to which conference participants HM1 to HMn belong is determined and then a seating order is determined according to the result of group determination

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such that participants belonging to the same group are set close to each other.

A process for determining a conversation group in the seating-order determination device GJD will be described below before seating-order determination processing performed according to a group is described.

Various group-determination rules used in the seating-order determination device GJD can be considered. In the following description, a rule in which a link is made between a person who pays attention to another person and the another person, who attracts attention, and one group is formed of persons who are coupled directly or indirectly by links is used as an example. Details of a group determination and update process performed by the rule according to attention-degree information in the seating-order determiner 71 of the seating-order determination device GJD will be described below. In this rule, one group is formed of persons who directly or indirectly pay attention to others, and the others, who attract attention directly or indirectly.

A condition in which a person directly or indirectly pays attention to another person, and the another person attracts attention directly or indirectly will be described with the following example. It is assumed, as an example, that a person A pays attention to a person B, and the person

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B pays attention to a person C. In this example, it is considered that the person A pays attention to the person B "directly" (the person B also pays attention to the person C "directly") and the person B attracts attention "directly;" and the person A pays attention to the person C "indirectly (through the person B)" and the person C attracts the attention of the person A "indirectly (through the person B)." In this example, there is only one person, the person B, between the person A and the person C. But, there may be a plurality of persons between the person A and the person C.

The seating-order determiner 71 holds an attention-destination table formed of an "individual number" column indicating numbers assigning to conference participants attending a conference held with this teleconference system; an "attention-destination number" column indicating the numbers of conference participants whom the conference participants HM1 to HMn using the teleconference devices TCD1 to TCDn pay attention; and a "whether registration has been made to group table" column indicating whether registration has been made to a group table, as shown in Fig. 6.

The seating-order determiner 71 also holds a group table formed of a "group number" column indicating numbers assigned to groups formed in the teleconference system; a "number of members" column indicating the number of members